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**Flash Gordon in the Fantastic Cliffhangers - see page 35**

# STARBURST

SCIENCE FANTASY IN TELEVISION, CINEMA AND GRAPHICS

Volume 2, Number 2

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No, you're not seeing things! After surviving that dreaded 13th issue, we thought we'd ring the changes with the new-look, brighter-than-ever *Starburst* magazine.

Not that we're risking the wrath of all our regular readers by totally changing our proven winning formula. But we've given the actual look of the mag a bit of a face-lift, complete with new cover logo, to attract a whole new audience, and show them exactly what they've been missing out on.

So, if you are a new reader...welcome! If you've been with us so far, watch out, for, as many letters have told us about each issue improving on previous successes, the best is yet to come.

SF oldies—always a popular subject—get more than their fair share this month, as we look back on the 'golden age' of tv's *Avengers* series, plus our coverage of those wonderful old Saturday morning sf serial thrillers, and the H. G. Wells classic movie adaptation *The Time Machine*.

Our interview with Tony Harding provides an insight into the special effects world of *Doctor Who*, while future fantasy productions are covered by our feature on the new 20th Century-Fox film *Alien*, plus an exclusive look at the new animation movie from the people behind *Fantastic Planet*.

Coming soon, *Star Trek—The Motion Picture*, *Star Wars 2/The Empire Strikes Back*, *Superman 2*, plus a whole lot more!

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Published monthly by Marvel Comics Ltd., Jadwin House, 205-211 Kentish Town Road, London NW5. All photographic material is copyright of BBC, NBC, ABC, CBS, ITC, IBA, Columbia, Scoops-American, Rank, Twentieth Century-Fox, United Artists, Warner Brothers, Paramount, Oppidan, Walt Disney, Toei Studios, CIC, EMI, MGM, and MCA-Universal and appears with their kind permission. All remaining content is copyright of Marvel Comics Ltd., 1979. All rights reserved. All Advertising to Top Team Productions Ltd., 97 Fleet Street, London EC4, 01-353 4992. Conceived by Dez Skinn. Printed in the United Kingdom.

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# A L I E N





After looking at the making of the film last month, *Starburst* presents a review by author John Brosnan who asks why film-makers tend to look to past movies for inspiration for their new projects.



**A**lien is a very annoying film, because on one level it is a masterpiece and on another it's a botched job. Or to put it another way – as a science fiction film it's seriously flawed, but as a horror film it works perfectly. But then the two genres, though they have been intertwined since the beginning of the cinema, have rarely been successfully reconciled. However one can't help wishing that the gap had been closed a little more than it is in *Alien*.

Dan O'Bannon, the originator of *Alien*, obviously grew up on the sf/horror films of the 1950s, as was evident from his first film, *Dark Star*, co-scripted with director John Carpenter. For just as *Star Wars* is an amalgam of a wide variety of George Lucas's favourite movie influences, *Alien* includes references to such films as *The Thing*, *The Quatermass Xperiment*, *Twenty Million Miles to Earth* and, in particular, *It! The Terror from Beyond Space*. The latter movie also concerned a spaceship that is invaded by an alien monster and, like the one in *Alien*, it infiltrates



the ventilation system and picks off the crew one by one. Eventually the surviving 'crew members retreat to the nose-cone of the ship where they have the bright idea of donning space suits and letting the air out – a procedure that successfully destroys the creature just as he smashes his way through the last hatch cover. I don't want to reveal the ending of *Alien* for anyone who hasn't seen it but I will

Opposite above: *The three astronauts (John Hurt, Veronica Cartwright and Tom Skerritt) approach the alien spaceship, which they believe to be the source of the distress call. Opposite inset: The crew of the Nostromo awaken from hyper-sleep. Opposite below left: Dallas (Tom Skerritt, standing) discusses the ship's position with the rest of the crew. Opposite below right: Kane (John Hurt) struggles in agony with the horrible after-effects of his infection by the alien parasite. Above: Kane and Dallas gaze in awe at the huge alien ship they discover on the planet's surface. Left: Veronica Cartwright plays the navigator of the Nostromo, Lambert.*

say there is a similarity of events here as well.

The main difference between *It* and *Alien* is a big one – at least ten million dollars. Whereas *It* and most of the *sl/horror* movies made during the 1950s were low budget “B” productions *Alien* receives the full “A” treatment with a huge budget, lavish sets, top-quality special effects, a good director and an excellent cast. However, though the rich surface trappings make it all seem new and original, underneath there is a 1950s “B” film struggling to get out – one that contains all the faults of that specific genre.

For instance, the excellent cast is wasted because, as usual in this type of film, there isn't much for them to do except react to the film's *real* stars – the sets and the special effects. And when they do get the chance to say something the “B” film script gives them lines like:

**Alien could have the world's worst actors and still be much the same.**

“Let's get outta here... this place gives me the creeps.” In reality you could put the world's worst actors in *Alien* and the result would be much the same because the characters are not required to be anything more than one-dimensional figures. (Of course the 1950s *sl/horror* movies often *did* feature the world's worst actors!) Having said that I must admit I would miss the presence of Sigourney Weaver in *Alien* – she succeeds in making an impression despite being smothered by the production values along with the rest of the cast.

But where *Alien* most reveals its “B” film origins is in the plot which is so full of holes it completely collapses once you start thinking about it. It is also needlessly confusing due to changes and deletions that have been made to the original script. For instance, the space ship *Nostromo* makes an unscheduled stop at a remote planet to answer an apparent distress call. The crew then find a crashed alien spaceship beneath which is a huge cavern containing the mysterious eggs that later cause all the trouble. The suggestion here is that the eggs arrived on the planet in the alien ship. Yet the original script reveals that the eggs are part of a genetic engineering experiment being carried out by the same Earth company that employs the crew of the *Nostromo*. The company is illegally involved in a project to create a perfect killing machine – the “alien” of the title. Unknown to the crew

**The crew of the *Nostromo* are merely expendable guinea pigs.**

of the *Nostromo* the ship has been programmed to pick up one of the eggs, activate it and return the resulting creature to company headquarters. The crew themselves are merely expendable guinea pigs being used to see just how effective the company's deadly creation is. But the crew, or some of them, learn the truth when they discover that one of their number is actually a robot working under the direct orders of the company.

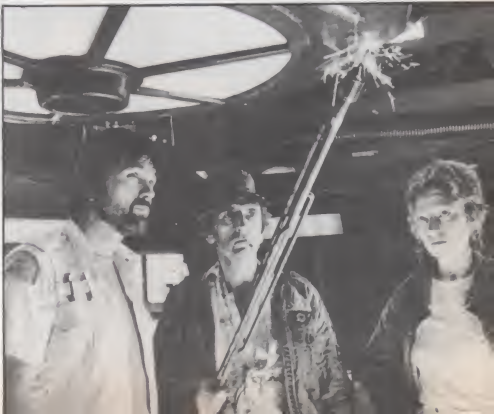
In the film one of the crew is found to be a robot too but in the original screenplay the company's involvement is not explained – only that he has been ordered to bring back the alien at any cost. The question this raises is that if the “alien” is a genuine alien and not the creation of the company, how did the company know of its existence? And if the

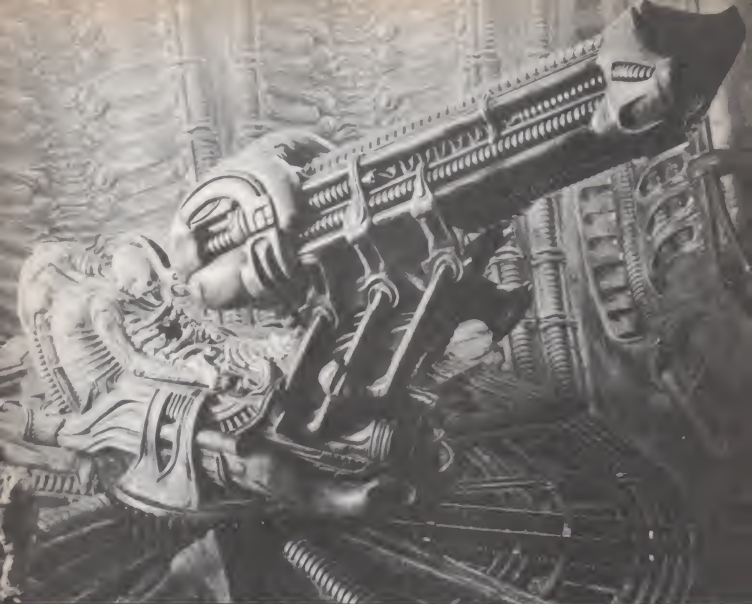
eggs are from the alien spaceship why do the remains of the dead alien in the ship bear little resemblance to the thing that hatches out of the egg? Or is the crashed alien space ship nothing to do with the eggs but another casualty of the company's custom-built monsters, its crew lured to its doom by the fake distress signal? If so, isn't this too much of a coincidence? I don't know. I just got very confused trying to work it all out.

Another deletion from the original script is the sequence where one of the crew members, Ripley (*Sigourney Weaver*), finds the bodies of two of the missing men hidden in the ventilation shaft. They are encased in cocoons and are being used by the creature as living incubators for the eggs it has implanted within them. One of the men, the Captain (*Tom Skerritt*) is still conscious and pleads with Ripley to kill him before the alien returns. She obliges by turning her flame thrower on both the cocoons, destroying them. Actually this sequence was shot but later cut out by director Ridley Scott because he thought it slowed down the pace of the film. This may have been the case but the loss of that sequence weakens the plot seriously because now audiences don't realize there is a *purpose* to the alien's extremely anti-social behaviour – he needs to attach humans in order to reproduce and ensure the survival of his species.

There are other flaws in the logical development of the plot and the scientific inaccuracies that one has come to expect in *sl* films these days abound. For instance, we hear sounds in space and also see a space ship being buffeted presumably by the shockwave created by a distant explosion when, of course, there is no

Above right: The *Nostromo* search party stumbles across the fossilised remains of a giant, insect-like creature at the controls of a bizarre cannon. Below left: Brett (Harry Dean Stanton) demonstrates his super-charged “cattle prod”, with which he aims to drive the Alien into a net, to Dallas (Tom Skerritt) and Lambert (Veronica Cartwright). Below right: An atmospheric character study of Tom Skerritt as Dallas, Captain of the *Nostromo*.





way that a shock wave can travel through a vacuum. And as usual the problem of the lack of gravity in space is completely ignored—everyone walks around and generally behaves as if the spaceship was parked somewhere on Earth. There's not even a mention of that old gimmick used by sf writers — “artificial gravity”. It may be an impossibility but at least it shows that someone is aware that conditions in outer space are rather different from those on Earth. It seems that all the pioneering work done by Stanley Kubrick in making a space film, 2001, that was scientifically accurate

**Dan O'Bannon is not too happy at the changes made to his script.**

has been forgotten by today's new film makers. Nor do audiences seem to care either, yet this sort of thing is the equivalent of someone making a western, set in 1850, which shows all the cowboys driving around on motor bikes.

Dan O'Bannon himself is aware of this problem and is apparently not too happy about the changes made to his original script. “My story has been rewritten twice now, first by Walter Hill and then by David Giler . . . when Hill came in to work on the script he said to me, ‘My strength is that I don't know anything about science fiction.’ I never understood what he meant by that. It makes me nervous,



though. These people literally go back to step one, ignoring all that has happened in sf literature since the thirties. They are making the same mistakes that sf writers were making decades ago. If all you know about science fiction is *Star Wars* then all you can possibly do is rewrite *Star Wars*.”

Okay, that's *Alien* considered as science fiction but it is as a pure horror film that one should really examine it, and as a pure horror film it is almost a complete success. Like all the best horror movies it creates the atmosphere of the personal nightmare, a mood that is

**The Alien resembles at times a giant, distorted human foetus.**

visually sustained by the bizarre, oppressive sets designed by Michael Seymour and based on the artwork of H. R. Giger and Ron Cobb. There's an unsettling *organic* appearance to the whole film which contributes strongly to the nightmarish feeling. The exterior of the alien spaceship resembles the pincer of a giant crab and the entrances look like huge orifices leading into some vast animal. The interior of the ship and the cave below it containing the eggs also create a strong impression of organic decay and even the interior of the *Nostromo* is a labyrinth of claustrophobic tubular tunnels that suggests the humans are trapped within



some larger creature.

The alien itself, designed by H. R. Giger, at times resembles some giant, distorted human foetus (one with chrome steel teeth) and this foetal imagery is reinforced by the monster's first appearance – erupting out of John Hurt's stomach in a grotesque travesty of human birth that is even preceded by the agonising equivalent of labour pains (not a film to see on a full stomach). The monster is wisely only revealed in a series of brief glimpses, except at the end where we see perhaps too much of it in long shot. Particularly effective, however, are the close-ups of its "face" – unlike most movie aliens this one really does appear *alien* because its physiognomy has been cunningly



Top: The *Nostromo* search party approaches the entrance of the derelict alien ship. Above: Ship's captain, Dallas (Tom Skerritt), takes a closer look at the fossilised creature aboard the wrecked ship.

#### Director Ridley Scott builds-up suspense with impeccable skill.

designed to offer no familiar feature at all (it has no eyes, for instance). By the time one has tried to work out *what* one is looking at on the screen there is no time left to look for defects.

Director Ridley Scott and Editor Terry Rawlings handle the buildup of tension and suspense with impeccable skill, pacing the shock effects at a steadily increasing rate. Finally it is a continuous barrage of light and sound battering the audience as the lone survivor in the film attempts to elude the monster and get out of the ship before it self-destructs. This is followed by a deceptive period of calm that culminates in a final kick to the nervous system which works even though it is expected. I certainly left the cinema feeling somewhat weak at the knees, a nostalgic reminder of how I used to feel after watching a good horror movie back in the 1950s when I was still growing up. Perhaps the weak knees were only a symptom of old age but I prefer to regard them as an indication of the film's effectiveness.

The only thing that worries me about *Alien* is that I fear it will lead to the inevitable flood of inferior imitations just as *Star Wars* led to *Battlestar Galactica*, *Humanoid*, *Buck*

*Rogers and Shape of Things to Come*. That would create the danger of the science fiction cinema going in the same direction it did in the 1950s when the genre was almost killed off by the hordes of increasingly sleazy,

cheap and shoddy monster movies I have a terrible suspicion that people like Roger Corman, Herman Cohen and Bert I. Gordon, not to mention Irwin Allen, are working on their versions of *Alien* at this very moment

#### Alien (1979)

Tom Skerritt (as Dallas), Sigourney Weaver (Ripley), Veronica Cartwright (Lambert), Harry Dean Stanton (Brett), John Hurt (Kane), Ian Holm (Ash), Yaphet Kotto (Parker), Bolaji Badejo (The Alien). Directed by Ridley Scott. Screenplay by Dan O'Bannon. Edited by Terry Rawlings. Director of photography Derek Van Lint. Production designer Michael Seymour. Art directors Les Dilley and Roger Christian.

Alien design by H. R. Giger. Alien head effects by Carlo Rambaldi. Special effects supervised by Brian Johnson and Nick Allder. Concept artists Ron Cobb, Jean Giraud and Chris Foss. Small alien forms by Roger Dickenson. Music by Jerry Goldsmith. Produced by Gordon Carroll, David Giler and Walter Hill. Executive producer Ronald Shusett. Released by Twentieth Century Fox.

Time, 116 mins

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STORY BY DAN O'BANNON and RONALD SHUSETT SCREENPLAY BY DAN O'BANNON MUSIC JERRY GOLDSMITH

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# THE AVENGERS

Last issue *Starburst* presented an overview of the first of the two Diana Rigg seasons of *The Avengers*. This month Richard Hollis examines the second of the two series which featured such fantasy episodes as *Return of the Cybernauts*, *The Positive Negative Man* and *The Living Dead*.



Realising that the most popular episodes of the first series were those with sf or fantasy oriented plots, the show's producers added extra fantastic episodes to the second Diana Rigg season of *The Avengers*. In the new series, which was filmed in colour, Mrs Peel's fighting technique—previously referred to as Karate—became Kung Fu, a 5000-year-old form of self defence, mostly unheard of by the general public in the late sixties.

Writer Philip Levene was responsible for seven of the best adventures, including stories like *From Venus with Love*, featuring laser beams from Venus, *Escape in Time*, which tells of agents travelling back through time to escape capture, and *See-Through Man*, with a scientist attempting invisibility.

Other interesting stories were *Hidden Tiger*, *Never Never Say Die*, *Return of the Cybernauts* and *Mission Highly Improbable*.

In the episode *Hidden Tiger*, Steed (Patrick MacNee) and Mrs Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) face a killer-form of the domestic cat, changed by a strange collar device to take on

## There is a flurry of claws and the torn victim bites the dust.

the savagery of a tiger. The opening of the story is especially weird. A distraught man is running from an unseen pursuer. He tries to open the door of a house, but finds it locked and turns in horror as a huge shadow looms over him. There is a sinister growling, a flurry of claws and the torn victim bites the dust.

Steed picks up the trail when his experiments with mini-microphones lead him to a local cat sanctuary, run by an eccentric cat lover called Cheshire (Ronnie Barker). It is here he learns the secret of the ferocious felines. The villain tries to escape in his van but recoils in horror when he sees one of the cats sitting beside him on the passenger seat.

Robert Day directed the three remaining episodes. The first, *Never, Never Say Die*, featured Christopher Lee as Professor Frank N. Stone, who builds a facsimile of himself, a humanoid that keeps escaping the confines of the laboratory and homes in on radio interference. (One poor chap driving a car with the radio on knocks down the humanoid twice.) A group of soldiers on manoeuvres meets the karate chopping robot and is



completely destroyed. In another scene, an old man sits operating his radio-controlled boat. As he changes the direction of the model, the robot also moves backwards and forwards behind him. Steed and Mrs Peel eventually come up against the Professor and his crazy double. In the exciting finale Emma has to karate chop her way to freedom from the clutches of the humanoid and only barely succeeds.

*The Return of the Cybernauts* featured Peter Cushing as Paul Beresford, brother of the unfortunate scientist (*Michael Gough*) in the first cybernauts story. With considerable charm, he entertains Steed and Mrs Peel as friends. He has acquired the services of his brother's assistant, Benson (*Frederick Jaeger*), and together they build a cybernaut

#### **Peter Cushing builds a Cybernaut to kidnap three top scientists.**

to kidnap three top scientists. Forced against their will, the men build a device which can control the human nervous system. The device is concealed inside a watch which Beresford presents as a gift to Mrs. Peel. Benson also substitutes Steed's watch for a nerve-controlling device, but although Emma becomes Beresford's human puppet, Steed forgets to wear his watch and arrives just in time to save her. When he slips his watch onto the cybernaut's arm, it reacts violently and crushes its creator to death. A marvellous sequel, interesting for its images of the cybernaut, a black-coated, steel-faced automaton marching across the countryside in pursuit of its victims.

*Mission Highly Improbable* tells of a foreign power stealing top secret weapons, such as tanks, by miniaturising them and then smuggling them out of the country as toys. Steed is trapped inside one of the tanks

when it is shrunk and consequently finds himself in a difficult predicament. Robert Jones, whose film credits include *The Dam Busters*, and who designed most of the sets for the series, devised the 72 foot long fibre-glass desk and the enormous telephone (which actually worked) for this episode.

Heralded by most as the best story of the entire season, the episode entitled *The Living Dead* opens with a small village pub. The local drunk staggers out into the night and passes through the local churchyard. Then to his amazement, a nearby tomb opens. Out of it rises the white figure of one of the late Dukes, who once ruled the land. As the drunk watches, the ghostly spectre enters the old chapel and rings the bell, a mournful warning to the curious. Steed and Mrs Peel investigate and whilst Steed questions the drunk, Emma explores the chapel. She meets Mandy (*Pamela Ann Davy*), psychic researcher from a society called FOG (Friends of Ghosts). Her feeling is that the chapel is haunted by the ghost of Rupert, the 11th Duke, killed five years before in a nearby mine disaster. Her opinion is contested by another researcher from SMOG (Scientific Measurement of Ghosts) who claims the haunting is a hoax,

then meets a grisly end swinging on the bell rope with a sword in his back. Mrs Peel decides to accompany Mandy the following night on her lonely vigil. Steed meanwhile meets the new Duke and his sinister gamekeeper, a menacing figure called Masgard (*Julian Glover*). That night Emma is kidnapped. Mandy, the researcher from FOG blames the ghost, but Steed's conversation with the drunk leads him to believe that the Duke did not die in the mining disaster. He decides to investigate the pit and Mandy goes with him.

In the meantime Mrs Peel is being held prisoner by Masgard and his secret army in a fantastic town constructed a mile and a half below the earth. The Duke, Rupert, is alive and also a prisoner. Emma discovers that his

#### **In *The Living Dead* the underground city is reminiscent of Metropolis.**

team of experts were forced to build the underground town by a foreign power. Steed is captured by Mandy who, it turns out, also works for the other side. He is sentenced to be shot, but Mrs Peel escapes and rescues him. Together with Rupert they journey back to the



Opposite: In *Mission Highly Improbable*, Steed is accidentally shrunk to a height of three inches. Above left: Mrs Emma Peel (Diana Rigg) exhibits her Kung-Fu fighting techniques to Mandy agent of FOG (Pamela Ann Davy) in *The Living Dead*. Above right: Mrs Peel is bound to a chair as the villain aims a laser at her in *From Venus with Love*. Right: Mrs Peel and Mandy investigate the haunted church in the episode *The Living Dead*.



One of the more unusual Avengers episodes, *The Winged Avenger* concerned a comic strip artist's creation coming to life. A fascinating scene during the episode showed the camera close in on the (newspaper strip) drawing of the Winged Avenger, then the scene melted into an identical live-action scene. In 1970 Editor Dez interviewed the late Frank Bellamy of *Dan Dare*, *Heroes the Spartan* and *Garth* (fame) concerning this sequence. Frank explained how he'd been given a blow-up of the live-action frame and was asked to (along with various other drawings) convert the photo into a black and white comic strip picture. When done, it was run before the live-action shot, to give a stunning, and unique effect.



surface, cutting off the escape routes and thus trapping the evil Masgard and his army far below the earth.

The episode was directed by John Krish (whose only other excursion into sf was the British movie *Unearthly Stranger*, 1963). The fantastic underground sets remind one of *Metropolis* and the soldiers' costumes appear to have been stolen directly from Truffaut's fireman in *Fahrenheit 451*. The graveyard and the chapel are eerie enough to appear in a classic Hammer horror film.

*The Joker* was a story by Brian Clemens which closely resembled *House that Jack Built*, in that it relates how a woman is lured to a lonely house. The episode was directed by Sidney Hayers, whose previous credits had been *Night of the Eagle* and the tv series *Arthur of the Britons*.

Another episode *The Positive Negative Man* was written by Tony Williamson and opened with a man working alone in his office, an idea used in a number of episodes, most effectively in *The Winged Avenger*. The light by his drawing board begins to flicker and crackle, we turn to the door as a man enters. Moving silently towards the scientist, he removes his hand from his pocket. On the end of his index finger is a small metal thimble. He reaches out, prods the scientist in the chest, there is a flash and the poor man is no more. The Positive Negative Man has struck.

John Steed and Mrs Peel, with the aid of a top security secretary to the Minister, track down the members of an abandoned experiment called Project 90, a system created to broadcast power—electricity by radio waves. Unfortunately the documents on Project 90 only turn up as charred remains as do all but one of the members of the project. It doesn't take Steed too long to deduce that the Positive Negative Man can only be the assistant of the sole survivor, Dr Cresswell (Ray McAnally), who is also part of the plot. The Positive Negative effect is achieved by insulating the assistant's body then charging him up with 25,000 volts of electrical power.

Emma is captured by the two villains and wired up to the electric generator. Using her voice as bait, Cresswell lures Steed to the scene. The plan is that when Steed attempts to free her, the voltage will be earthed, destroying them both. But the villains did not take into account Steed's insulated shoes. He

### **The Avengers made Diana Rigg an international star.**

frees Emma and together they force the Positive Negative Man's stockinged foot to the ground. The shock rockets him into the rafters. "You've ruined his make-up", remarks Mrs Peel. Again the eeriness of the silent destruction perpetrated by the villains in this episode adds up to a very weird, but highly enjoyable story.

When the colour series ended its run in March 1968, British viewers were treated to repeats of the black and white series with Diana Rigg. Later that year the new series with Linda Thorson as Steed's new partner,

Tara King, appeared. The colour episodes of Diana Rigg were screened again in 1969 after colour came to ITV.

The first Linda Thorson show was actually the 51st episode to feature Diana Rigg. In this particular story, called *Forget Me Knot*, she leaves Steed to return to her husband, who has miraculously appeared after surviving his plane crash three years before.

It's difficult to say exactly what caused the demise of *The Avengers*. Certainly Diana Rigg's decision to leave seriously affected the popularity of the show. Although *The Avengers* made her an international star, she had had a long fight with the tv bosses to earn the wage she felt she deserved. Patrick MacNee was toying with the idea of quitting around the time Diana Rigg left, but decided against it. His feeling was that when you start something you should see it through to the end.

The American network ABC, who were screening *The Avengers*, pitted the show against NBC's *Laugh-In* series. *The Avengers*







Opposite right: *The Winged Avenger strikes!*  
Opposite below: *The village drunk (Jack Woolgar) is sure the ghost he saw was an illusion in The Living Dead.*  
Top: *Mrs Peel (Diana Rigg) is captured by Dr Cresswell (Ray McAnally) in The Positive Negative Man.*  
Centre left: *The episode entitled The See-Through Man concerned a scientists' attempts to render himself invisible.*  
Centre right: *A rare behind-the-scenes photo of the crew filming a sequence from The Living Dead.*  
Right: *Steed (Patrick MacNee) bursts in to save Emma Peel from the deadly laser in From Venus with Love.*



Above: Steed (Patrick MacNee) and Mrs Peel (Diana Rigg) try to prevent the Cybernaut crushing the life from its victim. Far left: Patrick MacNee poses on the set of *From Venus with Love*. Left: Mrs Peel discusses the various aspects of haunting with the psychic researchers in *The Living Dead*.

American screening, no more **Avengers**. The episodes became laboured with new ideas that didn't work. Patrick Newell had been added to the cast as "Mother", Steed's boss. ABC rang Clemens to insist on this.

With 33 episodes under contract, the series was made and died in the American ratings. Linda Thorson, for all the charm and individuality she brought the series, was not Diana Rigg. ABC told Clemens they didn't want any more episodes. Their excuse was that the show was too violent. Audiences would count the bodies, even though no blood was ever seen on the screen. (Clemens had once described the programme as about as violent as *Grimm's Fairy Tales*.)

In March 1969 **The Avengers** came to its final episode. Patrick MacNee went to live in the United States, where old re-runs of the Diana Rigg series were becoming cult classics. Diana Rigg, after four feature films and a tv flop called *Diana*, turned her back on the American networks and returned to the theatre. Brian Clemens moved on to movies and **The Professionals** tv series. Linda Thorson vanished from the tv scene altogether.

In 1976 Clemens and Fennell, with Rudolph Roffi, created *Avengers (Film and TV)* Enterprises Ltd and resurrected Steed with

two new partners Gareth Hunt and Joanna Lumley. (Diana Rigg turned down an offer to return). Calling the series **The New Avengers**, it ran two series and was quite successful. Brian Clemens even included a story about the Cybernauts. CBS bought the series, and although it boasted some fine stories; the series never quite made the same impact.

Looking back over **The Avengers**, a lot of credit must go to Brian Clemens. He worked hard on the series and it shows, especially in the sf stories. The programme had encouraged all kinds of merchandise and several paperbacks were published in America. An **Avengers** annual was aimed at the Australian market. Four English paperbacks with colour photos on the cover of Steed and Mrs Peel were published by Panther books. Patrick MacNee even wrote two *Steed* adventures during the fourth series, and these were published in paperback by Hodder.

It is possible that **The Avengers** has been laid to rest forever and that is a pity. The time is now right to re-screen it on British tv and give a new generation of fantasy and sf lovers a chance to enjoy a series which stands up today just as well, and in some cases better, than it did over ten years ago.

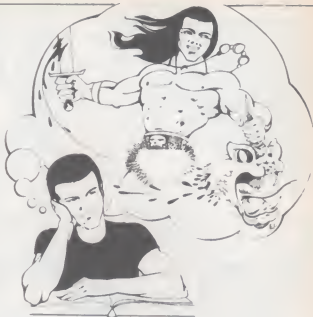
couldn't hold its own against such popular competition for long. After a difference of opinion with the tv bosses Clemens and Fennell were fired off the series. The Americans sent a tape tv producer to take over, but he failed to make **The Avengers** work through sheer inexperience. He never fully appreciated the working hours involved in making such a series. Eventually Clemens and Fennell were lured back to salvage the scripts commissioned in their absence. Linda Thorson was put under contract during the time Fennell and Clemens were off the show. Unfortunately she couldn't quite bring off the character.

By now the Americans were dictating how the series should be produced, reasoning that since they were keeping the series in the black they should have the final say. No more

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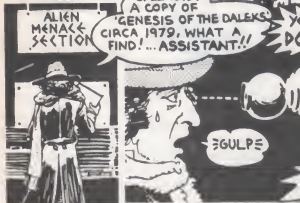
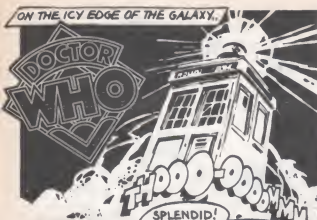
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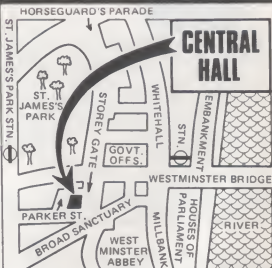
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# CUT PRICE MIRACLES

Since *Star Wars*, special effects has been a glamorous creative area. But what if you don't have a reasonable shooting schedule and millions of dollars to play with? What if you have to produce cut price miracles? John Fleming talks to BBC-tv Visual Effects Designer Tony Harding.

In feature films, success means getting perfection. In television, success can often mean simply getting anything on the screen at all. Although some of Britain's small-screen special effects are often criticised, the standards are surprisingly high—especially when you consider the pressures under which the special effects men work. To find out about some of these pressures, I talked to Tony Harding, one of BBC-tv's Visual Effects Designers who designed K-9 for *Dr Who*. The script merely called for "a mobile computer that vaguely resembles a dog". (It was originally to be called Fido.) How did this rather vague description of a computer develop into the K-9 everyone knows?

**The main problems in television production are time and money.**

"Well, I did a drawing," says Harding. "It looked a bit like a mechanical Pluto to begin with. I took it down and they said, *Lovely!* Originally, in the script, it was supposed to wag its tail once, have a probe coming out of its head, a gun out of its snout, ticker-tape out of its mouth and be able to move around. But then they wanted the head to nod backwards and forwards and up and down. They didn't want the tail to wag just once, they wanted it to continue wagging. And," says Harding laughing, "I built in the flashing lights that always have to be built in. It got more and more complicated to such an extent that the head had to be enlarged to accommodate all the mechanics. They wanted a working prototype in the studio for a test less than three weeks after I'd been given the script. So I didn't have time to make up another mould for the head—it was cast in fibreglass—and we just had to enlarge the existing one."

The main problems in all aspects of television production are time and money. Special effects are a perfect example of this.



Tony Harding explains:

"Even if the budget, by BBC standards, is good there's always a shortage of time. You receive a script and, two days later, they want you to come and discuss it all and they expect you to come equipped with all the ideas and all the solutions to all the problems. And then you find you've got another two weeks to go and prepare it all. It causes a lot of headaches for us. Also, a lot of directors don't appreciate how time-consuming effects are, both to prepare and shoot."

*Dr Who* is a classic example of this. Ironically, for a series concerned with the flexibility of time and space, time is the one thing *Dr Who* doesn't have. It is given the same shooting schedule as, say, a com-

paratively simple Noel Coward play. As well as the normal requirements of good acting, scripts, sets and technical standards, the *Dr Who* team have to cram in lots of physical and electronic effects. Each effect takes a certain amount of time to prepare and shoot. Each effect has its own problems. And, very often, there is only time for one "take". If the session over-runs the time booked for recording, there is the additional cost of "penalty payments" to the crew and all sorts of other costs and complications. So no-one wants to "go into over-runs". As a result, with time pressing, a lot of complicated effects sometimes have to be crammed into the last few minutes of the recording session.

**"The K-9 prototype was affected by all the stray radio signals."**

There is the example of the first *Dr Who* episode in which K-9 appeared. The new studio director was experienced in television work—but only in situation comedies and light entertainment. He arrived on *Dr Who* and the result (in retrospect) is almost like a situation comedy plot itself.

"We had this K-9 which had been knocked-up in about two weeks flat," explains Tony Harding. "It was a radio-controlled thing. The radio-control wasn't perfect at the time. We just didn't have the time to really test it. It worked all right in our workshop but, when we got it in the studio, it was affected by all the stray signals and transmissions and it was going all over the place. It was absolute chaos. And, apart from that, the chap had taken so long to shoot a normal day's *Dr Who* that, at about twenty to ten (at night) he hadn't got round to any of the effects."

"We had a sequence where liquid nitrogen came spilling out of some huge tanks, filling the floor with vapour—things breaking—and we had about two minutes to do it. They



couldn't afford another over-run and there was a lot of screaming coming out of the cans (headphones). The PA (Production Assistant) was on the floor saying *Just get as much as you can in the next two minutes!* We'd be getting something ready to shoot and WHOOSH the camera would be off before we'd actually completed it. Well . . ."

Tony Harding laughs when he remembers it. But that sort of thing can be very frustrating for skilled technicians and special effects men. Because it is they who are held responsible if less-than-perfect work appears on the screen. Tony Harding, for example, worked on BBC-TV's *Dracula*, which had a relatively high budget in BBC terms. Although most reviews praised the effects, some were critical.

"But the problem," says Harding, "is what we've just been talking about. From the time I was told I was working on *Dracula* to when it was completed and transmitted was about 2½ to 3 months. The editing took over a month (because two versions were made:

one for Britain and one for the US). The location filming was about four weeks. It left us about three weeks to make most of the major props. Obviously, a lot of things we would have liked to do had to be either abandoned or simplified."

There are also problems caused, not by recording schedules, but by transmission schedules. Tony Harding explains: "*Dracula* was originally going to be a three-part serial,

**"Whole scenes were cut from the BBC production of *Dracula*."**

but then the powers-that-be decided that it would be more impressive if it went out as one continuous programme. As a result, they had far more material to cram in than they had time. So whole scenes were cut out. Some model shots we did. There was the ship crashing on the shore: whole scenes we shot in the Television Centre; and quite a bit of location work. All cut out!"

Some of the *Dracula* effects scenes were shot at the BBC's own film studios (which used to be the Ealing Film Studios). Ealing has two water tanks built into the floor and one of those was used: "We had a great big rocker—a rocking arm—with the actual deck of the boat built on that. And that rocked up and down into the tank, which was full of water. And we also had some dump tanks full of water around the main tank."

Most of the scenes showing the ship at sea, however, used no water at all: "It was just sheets of polythene with a model boat on a central spigot so it rocked about. We had salt falling on it to represent rain and the inevitable bit of mist blowing around". One reason that water was not used is that the BBC does not have a large enough or a realistic enough tank for model filming.

Above: Tony Harding's original concept sketch for the *Power of Krill* story for *Doctor Who*. Right: Tom Baker, TV's *Doctor Who*, poses for a publicity photo with his co-star from the same story.

Tony Harding started his special effects career at Slough with Gerry Anderson's company Century 21. The facilities there were different—and better. "We had a big tank there that was about four feet deep, and it had a "water horizon". In fact, it was a weir—the water gushed over the back and was recycled and pumped back in. In that way, by having the camera very low, you can create a water horizon and, if you use a wide-angle lens, it also creates a lot of depth (ie distance to the horizon) and you just paint whatever you want on the backing. That's the sort of thing you just can't get hold of nowadays, because any model shots used in feature films are probably shot in Malta (where there is a large effects tank by the sea) or they're using models which are of an enormous scale like Derek Meddings used in *The Spy Who*

*Loved Me*. I mean, the actual model of that tanker was about sixty foot long, I believe (see *Derek Meddings Interview, Starburst 11*). We just don't have the money to finance that at the BBC.

"In the film industry, it's different. For example, the *Dracula* which they're shooting at Shepperton (directed by John Badham), they've been down there months now and it could go on for months. If they want a storm effect, they just flood a stage—build a huge model. It's frustrating for us because a lot of us here know that's the way it *should* be done and we could do it if the money were there."

Another difficulty of being a special effects man in television is that critics (both professional and non-professional) don't appreciate the pressures which limit what is possible on the small screen. Sometimes, even directors aren't aware of the limitations, as Tony Harding has found out:

"I remember a while back, when I was a Visual Assistant, we were doing some model



Mary Tamm and Tom Baker pose with the robot *K-9*.

shots for *Dr Who* of a spaceship flying along, doing a complicated manoeuvre and then exploding. And the director said: 'Yes, it's like that shot in *2001*'. I mean, Stanley Kubrick had just taken two years to perfect it and we had three days in this puppet theatre to do it.

"It's very frustrating when you've sweated blood and tears trying to think of the way to achieve a certain thing and you get either a critic in the paper or someone you know in the union or some freelance who says 'Oh, that was awful! It was so pathetic!' I wonder how they would cope with three weeks to prepare all the effects for a programme. After all, *Dracula* was a feature-length programme. It was 2½ hours or, when they showed three hour-long episodes, 3 hours. A *Dr Who* story is the same; it's almost feature-length."

The point, of course, is that a *Dr Who* story doesn't get the budget of the average tv commercial, let alone a feature film budget. Tony Harding once visited friends at Pine-

wood Studios and, in one hut, some effects men (whom he didn't know) were working on one of the Kevin Connor-John Dark fantasy films:

"One of the guys said 'What do you think of this?' It was a pterodactyl—a motorised one. The wings flapped. I said 'Oh—that's nice.' 'Yeah,' he said, 'It was made in a rush: we only had four weeks to make it.' Well, we had a similar problem (with a bat) for *Dracula* and my assistant had to knock one up in two days. It looked every bit as good. That gull you can see above your head is also mechanical: the wings flap on that. That was made in three days. But this chap was so pleased that he'd done it in four weeks."

### Certainly there is more BBC recognition of special effects.

When Tony Harding joined the BBC, after working on Gerry Anderson's series *Captain Scarlet*, *Joe 90*, *The Secret Service* and *UFO*, the Visual Effects department was quite small. Since then, it has expanded and is still expanding at a phenomenal rate. They now have their own workshops and base at Acton, in West London. And things are getting better all the time—perhaps because, as a result of *Star Wars* etc, people generally are more aware of the impact special effects can have. Certainly there is more recognition of the craft.

"It's true," says Tony Harding, "Even within the BBC, we've been elevated from the sort of labourers-on-the-floor level to something akin to Design. They now consider it quite creative. A lot of directors now are



*Doctor Who (Tom Baker) recoils from a grisly antagonist.*

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making more use of our department. There was a time when quite large production teams within the BBC didn't even know we existed. But now we've got this wonderful new workshop and office block here. We've actually been allocated quite handsome funds, by BBC standards, to equip ourselves. So, I think, at last people are beginning to realise that we serve a useful purpose."

Even so, you might think it would be difficult to get much job satisfaction with all the problems. Tony Harding, however, does:

"You get a lot of satisfaction if you do achieve something that comes off. You've put a lot of effort into it and it does turn out all right. Then you do feel as though you've achieved something, because the odds are stacked against you."

Has he ever thought of going into feature films?

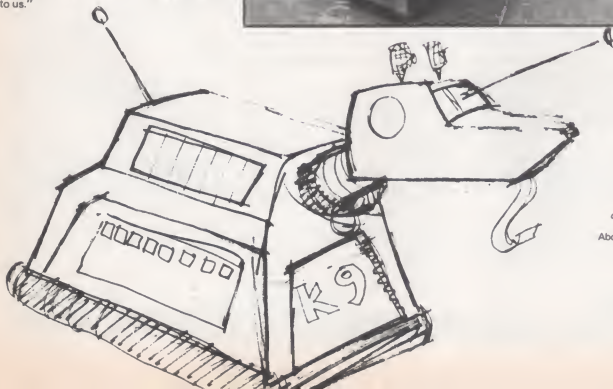
"I was asked if I wanted to go on to *Superman*. But it was towards the end of *Superman* and ..."

**"In feature films there are huge sums of money to be made."**

Presumably the insecurity is also a factor?

"Well, to a certain extent. Also because a lot of the work involves great long foreign locations and it doesn't make for a good marriage. I wouldn't like to shoot off to the West Indies for six months. My wife certainly wouldn't be very happy about it unless she could come with us. As we've got two children now, just approaching school age, that would be out of the question. That's one of the things. That's quite important to me."

"Also the hours you have to work in feature films. You don't have very much spare time once you're on a picture. And, since you can't afford to turn down any pictures, you just don't have any spare time. Huge sums of money. No time to spend it. Also, I like to be able to go and discuss things with people. It's the *entire* job I get satisfaction from: it's not just the actual making of effects and designing thing. Within our department, we're free agents. We're allocated to a programme and, so long as we don't cause any serious problems, how we choose to work is entirely up to us."



Left: Tony Harding's concept sketch for the computer dog K-9.  
Above: *The Doctor* (Tom Baker), Leila (Louise Jameson) and K-9.



Of course, the facilities at the BBC, a general television production company, are not yet up to the standard of Gerry Anderson's very specialised production company: "At Century 21, everything you wanted was there. There were tanks and mobile tanks clamped together. There'd be camera pits in the ground so you could get a camera absolutely down at ground level and build a set the entire length of a stage. There were lighting cameramen that appreciated the problems of lighting models. There was a great stock of all the basic things you need for model filming, like special tungsten wire to hang models on and special line and special motors. All sorts of things were there ready to be picked off the shelf and used."

**BBC cameramen are not specialised in model work.**

And, of course, BBC cameramen aren't specialised in model work as Gerry Anderson's technicians were. Quite a few cameramen—especially of the old school, who have now left—had little or no interest in model filming. It was just an unwanted chore for them. The results sometimes showed that. And sometimes, without meaning to, perfectly willing cameramen can cause terrible special effects headaches. In this year's *Power of Kroll* story for *Dr Who*, Tony Harding had to design a monster described in the script as

"something that resembles an octopus, about a mile across". That was only the start of his problems.

"The trouble is that it was shot badly. The cameraman was a young cameraman who was trying very hard and he was given some wrong information about how to achieve a split screen. There's the monster at the top and the foreground at the bottom. He was told (by someone in the camera department) to actually introduce a matte (a device which blacks out part of the picture) into the camera—into the lens. On location, we shot the foreground, with people running around. Then, on our model stage, we shot the background which was the monster waving his arms around. Then the labs, hopefully, were going to soften the edge. He should have shot full-frame of both (the location scene and the studio scene) and the labs could've put a soft-edged wipe in and that would probably have achieved it. But what had happened (because of the matte) is that there's a very, very hard edge and there's no way, because of the cost, that you're allowed to go and reshoot it."

So, through no fault of Tony Harding or the inexperienced cameraman, a less-than-perfect scene had to be transmitted. Ultimately, viewers are likely to dismiss it simply as "bad" work by the special effects man. Which is unfair. Also, of course, the best special effects are not noticed at all. Tony

Harding has worked on *The Explorers*, *The Dick Emery Show*, *Monty Python*, *The Light Princess*, *Come Back Mrs Noah* (for which he made the mechanical flying seagull), *The Aphrodite Inheritance* and many other productions. As he says:

"Lots of shows you wouldn't even believe had effects in them. I mean, this show *The Brothers Grimm* which I'm doing for *Omnibus*. Here's a list of the effects they want in it. Things like the glass slipper that Cinderella wears. In the original story, when the Ugly Sister tried it on, blood spurted out of it. I'll just have to build a reservoir in the high heel. We'll probably make it out of plastic with sets of tubes in there so that, when the foot goes in, it'll press a... Well, you see, once again,

**With the BBC you always have to find a cheap way of doing it.**

you've got to find a cheap way of doing it. You put a reservoir of blood in there so that, when the foot goes in, it will spread up and round the foot." I left Harding pondering another part of the Grimm script:

"There's a story about a diamond mountain or a quartz mountain. A bird flies up once every hundred years and wipes his beak on it and gradually wears the mountain away so that, by the time the mountain has worn down to the ground, that's that beginning of the end of eternity. I've got to do that somehow."

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a breathtaking new project—an animated science fiction feature film  
—in this special report by Tony Crawley.



chiatric clinic. In 1960, he wrote and directed *Les dents du singe/Monkey Teeth* with a group of Dr Oury's patients.

Four years later, he collaborated with the great Roland Topor for the first time, writing and directing *Les temps mort/Death Times*, an immediate award-winner. He worked again with Topor in 1965 on *Les escargots/Snails*, collecting more film festival prizes around the world.

He went back to his own easel in 1966 and exhibited his paintings in Paris and Brussels for the next few years, until commencing his most acclaimed endeavour, *Fantastic Planet* in 1969. The film lay unfinished for four years, and then began picking up awards with the

Cannes festival of 1973, having similar success in Atlanta, Trieste and Teheran.

Four years ago he wrote and directed *Le jeu/The Game* with the art of Jean Alessandrini, but it's *Fantastic Planet* that made his name—and led to Caneuram Products of Montreal and COFCI in Paris backing his Gillet-Laloux combine's new project, *Gandahar*.

Now that the animation is fully under way, the hunt for a scriptwriter is on—"a well-known American writer", insists Laloux—to adapt his version of the Andreuon book. The final film, therefore, will be in English.

And the story? Ah, what a story... Fantasy supreme combining soaring imagination and dazzling ideas with fast-



moving adventure and sensual excitement. The story is set on Gandahar, a planet lost deep in space, a wondrous land where time moves forwards and backwards, where the principal activities appear to be satisfying appetites for food and love. (Very French!)

"Everything is different on Gandahar," says Laloux. "It's governed by women—bold, lusty women who pursue the men. Its scientists have made large what is normally small, and vice-versa. Work no longer exists—the art of dreaming has taken its place."

Then trouble menaces this idyllic planet. Gandahar's birds, a special, one-eyed variety used by the inhabitants to keep watch on the frontiers, are suddenly being extinguished one by one. Something or someone is destroying them.

Syl Lanv', young and handsome of course, is detailed to investigate by Myrme Ambisextra, chief of the Female Council. And so begins the incredible adventures of our young hero—as he finds the terrible metal warriors, robots created by the Metamorph, preparing to invade Gandahar . . .



Next month: **Starburst** takes a closer look at the story of **Gandahar vs The Metal Warriors** plus, of course, more fabulous colour paintings by master sf artist, Philippe Caza.

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# THINGS TO COME

Starburst's ever-popular news column looks at what is new and what is upcoming in the worlds of cinema and television science fiction. Compiled by Tony Crawley.



## TOURIST TRAPS

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craft. Inside, a major laser battle is underway between a bunch of cleverly programmed robots and an actor. Thrilling stuff! Just in time, he saves the day, blasts the other door open allowing your tram through... and on to where Bruce the **Jaws** shark is waiting to pounce and make you drop your camera. Have a good trip!

Meanwhile you are urged to book now for another tourist special. Disneyland is on the move. Plans are now being implemented for Disneyland II on a 600-acre site in the Tokyo Bay area in Japan. Opening date: 1983. Cost: a mere \$400-million, give or take the odd hundred-thousand.



Director John Boorman (left) and Richard Burton (right) on the set of **Exorcist II**.

## TRAIN TIMETABLE

**Time Express**, the **Logan's Run** tv team's answer to **Supertrain**, started off in dull fashion on American television. Vincent Price and his wife Coral Browne, who according to -one American review could have played their roles with their eyes shut, take two people a week back to a chosen time—and for a particular reason. The people are chosen for their trip by the never-seen Head of Line. Jerry Stiller went back to 1969, when he'd found \$2-million which helped make him a tycoon. He wanted to know where it came from. He found out. The Mafia... James MacArthur, celebrating his departure from **Hawaii Five-O**, chose 1967, to find the adopted brother of his wife. She's dying of leukaemia in 1979, and needs a marrow transplant from someone close. She never knew she was adopted (yawn, yawn) and had no idea where any brother was. Jim did, found him, and convinced him to help out. The Prices and the other staff of the train were really more intriguing—victims of the train's wreck a hundred years ago.



**Time Express** star Vincent Price.

## TV MERLIN, TOO?

Sorry to have to upset you, John Boorman... But it looks as if Martin Poll's **Merlin** idea is only dormant inasmuch as it's now looming large as a tv mini-series format. The four hour-long **Arthur Rex**, from John Binder is slated for CBS-tv, we hear.

THINGS TO COME +++ THINGS TO COME +++ THINGS TO COME +++ THINGS TO COME +++



## MONSTER MOVIE 1

So at last the big secret is out about John Frankenheimer's ultra-secret movie: **Prophecy**. It's just another monster movie. Admittedly it's imbued with a touch more art, professionalism and of course, money, but given all the tales of locked sets, and ex-secret service types hired to guard location filming, we can be forgiven for expecting something more...original. Coppola's sister, Talia Shire, stars with a newcomer called Robert Foxworth. They're in a small Maine township for Foxworth to make an environmental study of the disputes between the local Indians and the town's paper mill. They're soon up to their contract clauses in all manner of gigantic fauna—industrial pollution, you see, Mercury poisoning. People are disappearing or being smashed to pulp. There's giant fish in the river, huge racoons in the woods and these deep scratches twenty feet up trees.

Foxworth has a pregnant wife to save, and he does, like some bionic beast himself. Robert Dawson handles the special effects, Thomas R. Burman supplies the make-up, but *Time* magazine's Frank Rich says, when we see it, the biggest creature of them all "looks like Smokey the Bear with an advanced acne condition."

Frankenheimer should have known—Roger Corman does it better, particularly today when Hollywood is beginning to spoof such movies. As in Corman's **Up From The Depths**, a forerunner of Universal's **Jaws 3**, **People O** from the **Jaws/Animal House** teams.

## METAMORPHOSES III

This time they think they've finally got it right. The third release version of the animation film of Ovid's **Metamorphoses** is now alive and getting better in America. The original production, animated in Japan, cost \$6-million. That one opened in 1977 and closed in rapid order. A mess. With some changes, more cuts then changes, it re-opened for business in May, 1978, still with soundtrack music from the Stones, the Pointer Sisters and Joan Baez. Business was fair to middling. Well muddling, really: very difficult to understand just what was going on on-screen.

Sanrio Films sent the movie back to the drawing-board. Or rather, the recording studio, at least. The third version, re-named **Winds of Change**, has lost seven minutes, including some of the standout animation sequences, and gained a disco soundtrack by Alec R. Costandinos, complete with a Casablanca Records album tie-in, of course. Just what Ovid has to do with boogie is perhaps neither here nor there when the problem is recouping six million dollars before making a penny.

Producer Walt de Faria was in charge of re-tailoring the mythological movie. Peter

Ustinov's new narration certainly clears up some of the five muddlesome tales involved, and if that doesn't improve the film's chances at the box office there's always Pattie Brooks warbling on the soundtrack. Now Sanrio are lavishing a further million dollars on promoting the new version—"from the heavens above to the middle of the earth...a tale of daring, power and mystery".

Now Sanrio is busy making an English version of their Japanese puppet-animated **Nutcracker Fantasy**. Gluttons for punishment!

## MONSTER MOVIE 2

As top US critic Judith Crist once said Hollywood is a monkey-see monkey-do town. So in the wake of **Prophecy**, Universal have decided to make the biggest of them all: **The Creature from the Black Lagoon**. (1954). Straight or spoof? Ah, that's the question. Maybe the director provides the answer—he's John Landis, the **Animal House** man. Evan Kim is preparing the script while Landis shoots his **Werewolf of London**.



Amityville Horror's  
Margot Kidder.

## TV SALES

Hollywood is fast becoming a bigger gambling centre than Las Vegas. It always was, of course. Which film will be a winner—which won't. But now the tv networks are playing the same game. With varying odds. When to buy a film for the box—before it's been seen or once it's been out and proved its worth. CBS-tv are exceedingly pleased with themselves just now. They've won—having snapped up the tv rights to America's biggest hit of the year, Stuart Rosenberg's **The Amityville Horror**, for a mere \$1,800,000 (which buys them three screenings). If they'd waited until the film opened, the price

would have been much higher. The stunning haunted-house movie is American-International's biggest ever smash—grossing \$20,156,237 in ten days. There won't be much for Rosenberg and his stars, James Brolin, Margot Kidder (**Superman's** Lois) and Rod Steiger, out of such a paltry tv fee, though. Meanwhile, director John Frankenheimer, is doing very nicely, thank you—his new monster movie, **Prophecy**, only went to tv after it opened to great business (which has since fallen off). The film was then sold for \$8-million for three screenings. The networks win some, and they lose some. BBC-tv, meantime, have bought **Superman**... which means the viewers win.



Above: The Nostromo search party explores the surface of the strange planet in Ridley Scott's *Alien*. Inset: The poster of the film.

## ALIEN CASH-INS

Look out Ridley Hard on *Alien*'s heels in the United States is... *Alien Force*, with John Ericson and Charles Aidman, from director Sharron Miller. There's also something (and I'm advised that is the definitive description for it) called *The Aliens Are Coming*... while William Devane's *The Dark* has now been re-hyped as an alien-monster movie, as opposed to last year's idea of just a monster-movie.

Rather better than any of the above items, I'm sure, is Marshall Brickman's *Simon*. Alan Arkin plays a New York university professor who is convinced by a team of scientists that he is, in fact, an alien visitor from outer space. "It's a comedy," says debuting director Brickman, "dealing with the plight of the individual in contemporary American society." Like if you

don't conform you don't belong here... But who, I hear you ask, is writer-director Marshall Brickman? Woody Allen's co-writer on *Annie Hall*, that's who. Another movie they created together was Woody's sf satire, *Sleeper*.

## AFTER ALIEN?

The real creative force behind *Alien*—Dan O'Bannon, co-author of the story, the script-writer and the film's visual concepts consultant—has a new story up his sleeve. And this one he'll write and direct himself. Title: *Assassins in Time*. Problem: he needs a \$10-million budget. No cheques to us, please. Real estate broker Juliette Cummins is helping Dan raise the cash. With *Alien*'s success she should manage that in no time at all.

## SCOTT'S KNIGHT

Meanwhile, the film which forced John Boorman back into motion with *Mertin*—Ridley Scott's *The Knight* scripted by Derek Marlowe—is the director's attempt to develop a special English subject, "perhaps the equivalent of the American cowboy," says Scott. The movie is set in the Crusades, and follows a knight returning to find home and family wiped out, and a woman he knows being burnt as a witch. It's a pure Clint Eastwood revenge movie from there. Ridley Scott directed *Alien*, of course; he got the job when co-producer Walter Hill had a prior appointment with *The Driver*. Scott says he jumped at the offer knowing the film would be a very successful thriller. Scott sums that up when he's asked what he wants to make after *The Knight*. "A real science-fiction picture..."

## MUSICAL MARRIAGE

Well, it had been rumoured for a long time... George Lucas has joined forces, musically speaking, with Robert Stigwood. The idea is to make film music better—in albums and on screen. George's Lucasfilm president, Charles J. Weber explains that Lucas has various projects at the moment involving endeavours in "computer technology, digital sound communications, and audio-visual entertainment." And Stigwood, you see, as well as all that *Saturday Night Fever* and *Grease* lucre, is heavily tied up with the Dutch and German technological giants, Philips and Siemens. The Who rock group are similarly investing in various forms of new musical hardware, plus a holographic movie venture and a holographic album cover for their Christmas release. Lucas, Stigwood and The Who may soon all be put in their places, though, by the newest American plans—postage-stamp sized albums, to be played with optical styluses... lasers in fact. What was it they used to say? In Britain albums are white, in China albums are yellow—these days in Hollywood, albums are pure platinum!

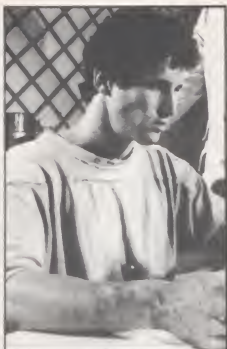


## TIME FLIES

It's not, apparently, the easiest place to get a round—the crew have all been given bikes, some prefer horses—but *Superman's* Chris Reeve is making Richard Matheson's *Some-where in Time* on a small Michigan isle called Mackinac. Ironically, it was last utilised in a movie back in 1946 for Esther Warkentzen's *This Time For Keeps*. Time, as they say, flies.

## RUSSELL'S ZOO

I had gathered Ken Russell had turned almost straight when he'd signed up for his first Hollywood movie—Paddy Chayefsky's *Altered States*, about the world of science. Don't you believe it. Ken is no altered man. For one sequence he recently sent out for three two-ton elephants, a 5,000 lb rhino, three bull mastiffs and a herd of Sardinian sheep...



## FANTASY FAN

Hollywood newcomer Michael Ontkean—one of Paul Newman's ice-hockey hulks from *Slap Shot*—has a thing about fantasy women. He co-starred in *Voices with The Fury's* (and Spielberg's) girl, Amy Irving. Now he's making *Willie and Phil* with Margot Kidder—aka Lois Lane. I don't blame him, in either case. Mike tried his own hand at fantasy in the grisliest of Ronald Dahl's recently screened *Tales of the Unexpected*, *Man from the South*.

## DOWN UNDER

British director Peter Collinson—who films anywhere but Britain these days—is in Australia making *The Earthling*. His stars are William Holden and the kid from *The Champ*, Ricky Schroder. (Well, *Close Encounter's* Cary Guffey is busy in the States, you see).

## SPAGHETTI SF

Rome producer Italo Zingarelli is developing a major space movie for 1980—*The Day of Days*. Or the film of films as far as Italo is concerned, and not just for his Metropolitan combine but the Italy's industry as a whole. His director is Alberto De Martino who lately completed *Pumaman* for Italo. Small lasagne compared with *Day of Days*. "I consider this an important project for Italian cinema. I'm investing millions of dollars in social effects equipment—some of which is already being tested on *Pumaman*—with much more to come. We will have our own front projector, image effects equipment, aerial

image equipment, everything needed to produce big fantasy pictures at home. The equipment will be available to the entire industry and also to foreign producers filming in Italy." They'll have a longish wait, though. *Day of Days* is slated for a full year's schedule—"once the pre-production has been fully dealt with."

## POSSESSIONS

Among the 1980 movies announced in Canada is a \$5-million drama called *Possessions* which is... no, you wouldn't believe me. So I'll just quote the Polish director, Vukovsky. "It's about a woman who has an affair with an unformed mass that takes human shape." Any suggestions about actors who resemble unformed masses to Mr Vukovsky please, not us.



## BUCK ON TV

*Buck Rogers* has made his way back to US television in a series format. Gil Gerard stars still, with Tim O'Connor's Dr Huer and Erin Gray's soldier girl Wilmer Deering from the movie

## BRIEFLY

British director Peter Medak is following his last movie *Changeling* with a \$5-million sf item called *Evening Flight*...

*Batman's* Catwoman, Lee Merweather turns up again in *Mirror, Mirror*, a tv-movie with UNCLE's Robert Vaughn...

Among the people helping *Alien* to smash box-office records in New York cinemas: Eli Wallach and Dustin Hoffman...

Lynda Carter's *Wonder Woman* show has been scrapped in America...

*King Kong's* make-up man, Rick Baker, is creating a very special beastie for a beauty and the beast drama called *Tanya's Island* on the isle of Maui...

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# STARBURST LETTERS

## SF Radio?

Congratulations, the magazine is working really well—a nice mix of past (*SF Classics*), present (reviews of *Lord of the Rings*, *Humanoid*, etc) and future (*Things To Come*).

To the point of this comment, as a sf buff, naturally enough I am interested in the genre as portrayed in television, cinema and comics, but what of the neglected medium of radio? As a kid I spent many enjoyable hours listening to BBC's *Journey Into Space* on my headphones. I am certain that many of your older readers would love to see an article about the programme.

Come on *Starburst*, get your top writer/investigator on this and bring Jet Morgan, Lemmy, Mitch and Doc back to life.

Colin Wise, Welthamston, London.

## Pointless Comparisons

*Starburst* is certainly a relief after all those American magazines we've been receiving lately, padded out with "science fact" to excuse the lack of articles. I hope your magazine continues as well as it began with volume one.

However, the main point of my letter is the letters page in issue 12. This month serves to reinforce the main topic of discussion brought up in recent *Starbursts*, namely the comparing of one feature, such as *Star Wars* to *Close Encounters* or *Gelectice*, and no individual credit. Sure, when a trend commences we can all expect cash-ins, but we all know these films are following *Star Wars*' success, so why point it out when it's obvious? It is coming to the stage when nobody cares whether movies are enjoyed now; it seems one film must serve only as a yard-stick for its successors.

I would also like to comment on Alan Parry's letter. His points are valid and I agree with him, except when it comes to *Galactica*. I too read the book before seeing the film, and I found myself saying "Ah, yes, I remember this bit, I know what happens . . . which, rather than spoil it, enhanced my view of the film. The reason for Alan's confusion was not Glen Larson's script but rather the abysmal editing of *Star Wars*. We received the first two pilots spliced. The entire section featuring Laurette Spang's role as the sociolator Cassiopeia was deleted from our edition to give it a "U" certificate!

To justify the effects, all American TV series are shot in 175 framing. Films are in 185 framing, obviously larger for a larger screen, thus the unevenness. The same, limited effect can be noticed in the two *Spider-Man* features. Finally, the *Galactica* pilot was filmed, due to TV restrictions, in an unbelievable space of eighteen days! *Star Trek—The Motion Picture* Took 124 days. *Galactica* did the best it could with what Universal gave them—not very much. The fact that Universal passed up *Star Wars*

goes to show they are incapable of producing good TV. With *Buck Rogers* proving successful, good TV science fiction might not be far away.

Thanks for letting me sound off. How about a more detailed article on the new strain of TV superheroes? The Spidey and Hulk articles in issues 2 and 4 (I haven't forgiven Sam Deli for the Spiderman quips) only touched the surface. What about the new *Doctor Strange* or *Captain America*? (Whether Prince Namor could succeed where Patrick Duffy sank has yet to be seen). As for your classics corner I have only one suggestion, a film that has yet to be reviewed properly the forerunner of the best of sf—*Metropolis*. And, after the fantastic behind-the-scenes *Alien* feature in issue 8 I anxiously await a review—the book is stunning. Oh, and many thanks for *Nosferatu* in issue 11.

Congratulations on the competition of your first (somewhat erratic) volume (but every issue was worth the wait!) and many more to follow.

Peter Martin, Whitely Bay, Tyne and Wear.

## More TV Coverage!

I must congratulate you on your excellent magazine. I have been reading it since issue 1 and it has got better all the way, with the possible exception of *Starburst* 4.

The *SF Classics* series is brilliant. Please continue to print the original posters even if they are not centrespread pull-outs.

The coverage of recent films is just as good, though I felt you dissected the *Superman* movie too early—you should have left it until the film had been around a bit. My second complaint in this area is about your coverage of *The Humanoid* (*Starburst* 11). Could we not have been warned earlier? Yes, I'm one of those who had to suffer it, though it was made easier to bear by putting it with *Jeson* and the *Argonauts*.

The only thing that is really letting you down is your lack of coverage of television. I know you had Terry Nation in *Starburst* 6, and Gerry Anderson in *Starburst* 8. But you should run more reviews.

Other than that, keep up the good work.

Michael Turner, Wendsworth, London.

## Things to Come Soundtrack

Readers of the *Starburst Classics: Things to Come* feature in *Starburst* 11 might like to know that Bliss's music was first made available as a suite in 1935 on three 78 rpm discs (Decca K810, K811 and K817), following a successful Promenade Concert performance at the old Queen's Hall. The first four sides feature the composer himself conducting the London Symphony Orchestra, though the remaining two sides feature Mui Mathieson conducting. The assiduous collector should have little

difficulty finding these discs as they sold in fairly large quantities.

Bliss recorded the suite again in 1959 in stereo. This later recording lacks both the immediacy and the marvellous choral finale of the original, but is still in the catalogue (Decca Ace of Diamonds SDD255).

According to John Huntley in his book *British Film Music* (1947), Bliss was not entirely happy with the music as he felt that he had surrendered his musical individuality to the needs of the film. Immediately afterwards he had to purge his mind of it by composing his *Suite for Strings*.

Your report on the sad death of John Robinson was incorrect in stating that he was the original Professor Quatermass. In *The Quatermass Experiment*, produced for BBC-TV by Rudolph Cartier in 1953, the professor was played by Reginald Tate. John Robinson played the part in the 1955 production of *Quatermass II*. In the third serial, *Quatermass and the Pit*, broadcast during the winter of 1958/9, the professor was played by Andre Morell.

Ray Denton

Thanks for the information, Ray. We should also mention that George Geddes pointed out our error over crediting John Robinson as the original Quatermass. Sincerest apologies to all concerned.

## Critical Reviews

When your magazine first hit the bookstands last year I glanced through it and dismissed it as another *Star Wars* rip-off. *Starburst* 1, with its cover featuring the *Star Wars* characters, and the wealth of *Star Wars* pictures inside brought me to this conclusion.

In truth, I thought your magazine would last only as long as the popularity of *Star Wars*. Now, eleven issues later you are still in business and getting better every month. The reasons for this are obvious. The diversity and quality of your articles, excellent stills and, above all, your ability to criticise. If a film is good, you'll praise it. If it's bad, you'll knock it. And that, I feel, is precisely what the reader wants. With the current boom in science fiction cinema the majority of films being churned out with the genre are pretty awful. I am getting sick of searching the cinemas for something worthwhile and instead end up watching something like *Laserblast*, *The Shape of Things to Come* and, possibly the worst offender of all, *The Humanoid*.

This is where *Starburst* comes in, as a guide to the good and the bad. You save us the time and money wasted in going to see the bad films and making sure we know about the good ones. So here's my thanks to reviewers Tony Crawley, Bobby Dupea, Alan Murdoch and the rest of your master critics.

Paul Maled, Manchester.

# FANTASTIC CLIFFHANGERS

From 1929 to 1956 over 230 film serials or "chapter plays" were produced by such major studios as Columbia, Universal and Republic. Each running an average total of six hours, these cliffhangers were high on thrills, low on budgets, but always entertaining. In this, the first of two parts, Tise Vahimagi covers the pre-war period of 1934-1940.



**W**arrior from another planet annihilates space... eliminates distance... carries diabolical devices!"

*"Amazing exploits of death-defying daring! Zooming from planet to planet in spark-spluttering space ships! Battling human robots! Conquering new worlds!"*

It was copy like this, believe it or not, that packed them into matinee showings for over twenty years, during the 1930s and '40s. The Saturday Matinee Serial (or chapter-play) was the staple diet of the under-15s for more than two decades, offering action-over-words in weekly, 20-minute instalments.

Although the movie serial was born almost simultaneously with motion pictures it was the introduction of sound in 1929 that really set the style and pattern for serial action. Derived mostly from the comic-strips and pulp magazines, the serial soon established a formidable gallery of super-heroes and assorted villains;

the thirties' heroes were mainly of the straight-jawed, daring, fists-of-tungsten type, such as The Spider, Flash Gordon and "Crash" Corigan — whereas the forties yielded "real" super-heroes like Captain Marvel and Superman.

Between 1929 and 1956, over 230 serials were produced, mostly from the thriller-fac-

## The foremost element in the serials was Action.

ories of Universal, Columbia and Republic. Of this enormous output only some 12% of the serials produced were science fiction, in one form or another.

The basic format for a serial was simple: the first episode (usually running to about 30 minutes) introduced the central characters, the good guys and the bad guys, and the main plot. The plot would be something along the lines of

a scientist inventing, for reasons known only to himself, a strange ray-gun device which is immediately stolen by some bizarre villain, who calls himself The Wizard or The Scorpion or some such sparkly name, forcing the hero and his pals to face incredible hazards for twelve chapters (sometimes fifteen) in order to recover it.

The foremost element in serials was *Action*, with a capital *A*. Nobody ever walked in the serials, they always ran. The plot kept going from one fistfight to another, and the dialogue was kept to a minimum. Nobody's hat was allowed to fall off during a rock 'em-sock 'em fistfight and the only thing you could be sure of was that at the end of each chapter the hero would be left for dead at the mercy of some terrifying element. It was during the silent period that serials became known as "cliffhangers", usually due to the hero or heroine being left hanging by their fingertips on the edge



Opposite: Flash Gordon (Buster Crabbe) stands with a group of Hawk Men from *Mongo* in *Flash Gordon* (1936). Top: a lobby card from the feature film reissue of *Flash Gordon* depicting Flash and Aura (Pricilla Lawson). Note the censor's stamp of approval. Above left: The lobby card for episode 10 of *The Lost City* (1935). Above right: The excellent poster for the serial *King of the Wild* (1931) which featured Boris Karloff as a villainous shaiik.

of a cliff-top. With the variety of gruesome dangers facing the heroes during the thirties and forties, the serials should have been re-named "headcrushers", "decapitators" or simply "mutilators".

The earliest sound science fiction serial to appear was Universal's *The Vanishing Shadow*. Not really a true "science fiction" tale, the story deals with a character (played by Onslow Stevens, who later turned up in *House of Dracula* as a mad doctor) who assembles a wide array of technological devices and gadgets, including a ray-gun, a vanishing belt and an odd-looking robot, in order to revenge himself against the bad-guys who were responsible for his father's death. *The Vanishing Shadow* was not a particularly exciting serial, with most of the events depending a lot

backed servants, giant natives, the "Path of Skull", Spidermen pygmies, etc. The cast of characters and gadgets is unlimited and, along with the plot, totally outrageous.

It should also be mentioned that the Zolok character at one point explains that he is the last of the "Ligurians", a race of master scientists, and is now carrying on the "electromagnetic tradition of his people". In only the space of 12 chapters this serial speeds through countless characters, lost tribes, lost villages, white pygmies (honest!) and a host of strange people, with enough forbidding territories to put the adventures of Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter and Carson Napier to shame.



However, all was not lost, for in that same year there came along one of the best science-fiction serials of the thirties - Mascot's *Phantom Empire*. Directed at an exciting pace by Otto Brewer and B. Reeves Eason, and featuring cowboy-star Gene Autry, *Phantom Empire* combines perfectly the galloping hooves of the B-Western and the pseudo-scientific gadgetry of the pulps.

Gene runs a radio-station from his dude ranch which happens to lie on top of land containing radium deposits. Naturally, there are crooks trying to get rid of Gene and his pals for

the land. It is accidentally discovered, also, that some 20,000 feet below Gene's ranch there lies a futuristic metal city called Murania, inhabited by an advanced race possessing powerful weapons and ruled over by an ambitious Queen. Eventually all the characters get captured by the Muranians and just when it looks like it's going to be curtains a revolt breaks out. During the battle, Gene and his buddies make good their escape while the Muranians destroy themselves with a death ray.

Some of the effects in *Phantom Empire* are quite exciting, taken on the serial's own level of course, but the fiery sparks and dancing electricity were done to better effect in the later *Flash Gordon* serials. However, *Phantom Empire* gallops along amid death rays and robots most effectively, despite the presence of

### It cost Universal \$350,000 to complete *Flash Gordon*.

a bunch of crazed kids called The Junior Thunder Riders, who ride aimlessly around Gene's ranch getting in the way of the action.

*Flash Gordon* is probably the best science-fiction serial of the thirties, and the most expensively produced. It had cost Universal an incredible \$350,000 to complete the 13 chapters of *Flash Gordon*. Incredible because no other serial-producing studio had even shelled out that much before, or since. The follow-up, *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars*, was given the budget of \$175,000 - quite a drop from the over-budget of the original.

Universal rushed *Flash Gordon* on to the screens just two years after Alex Raymond's strip appeared, and since that time it is the movie version that has grown in legend. Raymond's strip first appeared in the Sunday comic strips, distributed by King Features, on January 7, 1934. The strip was an immediate



Top: *Flash Gordon* (Buster Crabbe) battles for his life. Above: A scene from the seventh chapter of *The Lost City* (1935), in which Claudia Dell prevents Sam Baker from strangling Kane Richmond. Left: Dale Arden is restrained as Ming and members of his court watch *Flash* fight for his life. *Flash Gordon* (1936). Opposite top: *Flash* meets the king of the *Clay People* in *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* (1938). Opposite centre: Gene Autry in the thick of the fighting in *The Phantom Empire* (1935). Opposite below: Buster Crabbe strikes a heroic pose in the title role of *Buck Rogers* (1936).



success, as was the movie version, and both forms of Flash Gordon remain at the top of their respective ladders.

The story tells of the worldwide panic caused by atmospheric disturbances due to the planet Mongo rushing toward earth. Flash and his companions, Dale Arden (*Jean Rogers*) and Dr Alexis Zarkov (*Frank Shannon*), take off in Zarkov's rocket ship in an attempt to avert the approaching disaster. They land successfully on Mongo and are immediately captured by soldiers and taken before the cruel dictator Ming the Merciless, "Emperor of the Universe" (*Charles Middleton*). For the next twelve chapters, the trio undergo the most rigorous and hazardous trials ever cast upon serial heroes; in a continuing series of capture and escape and re-capture they encounter Lionmen, Hawkmen, Witch-Queens, Sharkmen, Monkeymen, Dragons and an assortment of savage beasts. Eventually, however, they



manage to defeat Ming with the aid of the Lionmen and return to earth.

Adhering closely to the first year of Raymond's newspaper strips, *Flash Gordon* contains an extraordinary amount of imaginative plots, sub-plots, characters and gadgets, as the story develops it produces, apart from space ships and weird creatures, a vast array of invisible rays, disintegrating machines, dehumanising rays, an entire city suspended in the sky by beams of light, an underwater city operated by magnetic forces and various other out-of-this-world oddities.

This was Buster Crabbe's first appearance as Flash Gordon. He went on to play the character in two more serials and also put in time as Buck Rogers. However, it is Flash Gordon that Crabbe is mainly associated with, making the part uniquely his.

Another classic sf serial was also released in 1936 – Republic's *Undersea Kingdom*. In keeping with the *Flash Gordon*-type set-up of mythical kingdoms and supposedly advanced races, with feudal traditions, *Undersea King-*

come Ray "Crash" Corrigan, Professor Norton (*C. Montague Shaw*), Diana Compton (*Lois Wilde*), the professor's son Billy (*Lee Van Atta*) and two sailors, Briny (*Smiley Burnette*) and Salty (*Frankie Marvin*).

Needless to say, Unga Khan is all set for world conquest and captures Professor Norton, forcing the old man to do his bidding by placing him in a "transforming cabinet". From this point on, naval officer cum super-athlete "Crash" Corrigan battles everything from Volkites (mechanical guards) to the Juggernaut (a mechanical tank-like vehicle) as well as most of the Black Robe army. Eventually, however, "Crash" manages to overcome incredible odds, rescue everybody and escape in a Volplane just before the US Navy let loose on the Atlanteans.

A well-made serial, *Undersea Kingdom* remains, by way of second-by-second action, as exciting as both *Flash Gordon* and *Phantom Empire*. The Volkite robots, incidentally, show up again, albeit re-dressed, in 1952's *Zombies of the Stratosphere*.

*Fighting Devil Dogs*, in 1938, featured a villainous character called The Lightning – a mysterious criminal who happily zaps homemade thunderbolts and various electrical charges around the country. *Fighting Devil Dogs* is basically a serial whodunnit, as one of the leading scientist characters is in fact The Lightning. Our heroes, Lt Tom Grayson (*Lee Powell*) and Frank Corby (*Herman Brix*) undergo twelve death-defying episodes in order to track him down – and then, finally, he is shot out of the sky by a ray machine belonging to one of the good guys (?).

Ming's back and Flash is after him, in 1938's *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars*. Directed this

time by Ford Beebe and Robert Hill (Frederick Stephani helmed the original), this Universal 15-chapter serial saw our handsome trio – Flash, Zarkov and Dale – in action once again against Emperor Ming (*Charles Middleton* repeating his role), who is busy stealing nitrogen from the earth's atmosphere. Once again they meet a bizarre collection of characters: Clay People, Tree People and the magical Queen Azura. The final outcome sees Ming tossed into a "disintegration chamber", while the powerful lamp that has been absorbing earth's nitrogen is destroyed.

Deviating somewhat from Alex Raymond's strip, *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* introduces a comical character called Happy (*Donald Kerr*), changes Dale Arden's hair from blonde to brunette and changes the action from Mongo to Mars. A better constructed serial than the original, this follow-up employed more meaningful dialogue; the original contained a lot of "Hold on, Zarkov" and "Steady, Dale" from Flash. *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* also used a lot of footage from the first one, along with bits and pieces from the 1930 sf movie *Just Imagine*.

Universal's own attempt at topping the *Flash Gordon* series came in 1939 with Ford Beebe and Saul Goodkind's *Buck Rogers*. Something of a disappointment following the multiple adventures and peoples in the *Flash Gordon* serials, *Buck Rogers* nevertheless manages to deliver the goods by way of various pseudo-scientific escapades.

The plot, based on the novels by Philip Francis Nowlan and the comic strip penned by Phil Nowlan and drawn by Dick Calkins, begins with Buck and his young pal Buddy crashing their dirigible in the Arctic. Preserved

### ***Undersea Kingdom* begins with earthquakes causing havoc.**

dom was a panorama of science-fantasy thrills.

Very much in the *Flash Gordon* mould, *Undersea Kingdom* begins with events such as earthquakes causing havoc in the world but, unlike the previous fantasy outing, the heroes in this one have to journey under the ocean and enter the legendary Atlantis in order to settle the problem.

What is actually happening is that in the lost continent of Atlantis there are two factions in deadly combat: the White Robes, led by the high priest Sharad (*William Farnum*), and the Black Robes, followers of the tyrannical Unga Khan (*Monte Blue*). Into the middle of this conflict





in a state of suspended animation by some mysterious gas they re-awaken some five hundred years later. Needless to say, things have changed and the world is now in the power of one Killer Kane and his gangland hordes. Buck and Buddy meet up with the good guys and proceed to combat Kane's gangsters and the "Zugg" men. Unfortunately, there is a lot of rocketing around, especially between earth and Saturn. **Buck Rogers** is, despite some tedious moments, quite a polished serial, utilising a goodly amount of outdoor locations and photography. Buster Crabbe's portrayal of Buck doesn't come across as naively as his



Top: The characters in *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* would have looked more at home in *Robin Hood*. Left to right: Dr Zarkov (Frank Shannon), Flash (Buster Crabbe), and Dale Arden (Carol Hughes).

### **The Phantom Creeps starred Bela Lugosi as an eccentric scientist.**

Flash Gordon but an over-generous portion of the visual action is given to Jackie Moran's Buddy, a sort of "junior" Buck Rogers.

The last of the thirties' sf serials came, again, from Universal, in the form of *The Phantom Creeps*. Directed by the same team that handled *Buck Rogers* – Ford Beebe and Saul Goodkind – *The Phantom Creeps* featured Bela Lugosi (under Universal contract at the time) as an eccentric scientist who has invented a weird gallery of powerful weapons, including a giant robot. Although at first a well-meaning fellow, he refuses to share his inventions with the US government and, when his wife is accidentally killed, goes berserk, planning to use his strange arsenal in an attempt to take over the world. Finally, his laboratory is bombed by the military and he is forced to escape in a tiny plane along with a highly-destructive element, extracted from a piece of meteorite. With this he hovers around the sky threatening to blow up the world. Although *The Phantom Creeps* is an absurdly delightful fantasy serial, the final "threat to the world" sequence is simply crazy; obviously, Lugosi doesn't consider the fact that blowing up the world may also affect him. And with the world blown up, where is he going to land his

little plane?

Universal turned out the last Flash Gordon serial in 1940 – *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe*. Starring Buster Crabbe again as Flash and Frank Shannon as Zarkov, the Dale Arden part was played by Carol Hughes. Once more, Ming the Merciless is up to no good. In fact, Ming attempts exactly what the title claims. However, he doesn't achieve it and Flash doesn't conquer it either. Ming betrays his plans of cosmic conquest by infecting the Earth with an epidemic called "Plague of the Purple Death", which hurries our heroes into action. In trying to thwart Ming's invasion Flash and his pals journey to Mongo, take time out to visit the frozen wastes of a land known as Frigia and eventually blow up Ming along with his stronghold.

Something of a disappointment to Flash Gordon fans, this serial outing was an unin-

spired space opera with only the side-trip to Frigia to boost interest. A sad final curtain on the Universal Flash Gordon serials.

The serials throughout the 1930s maintained a certain innocence, a special quality that separated them from the real world and plunged the viewer into a land of sheer fantasy. *Undersea Kingdom* and *Flash Gordon* epitomise this period, which remained happy revelling in strange lands and even stranger people, caring little about the trend in the feature film sf genre. A new decade was just starting, with new heroes, new adventures and new worlds to conquer.

**Next month: Part Two of *Starburst's* look at the great sf serials covers the superheroes from *Superman* to *Commando Cody, Sky Marshal of the Universe*.**

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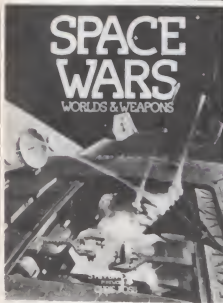
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# BOOK WORLD



## SPACE WARS, WORLDS & WEAPONS

by Steven Eisler

*Space Wars* is a baffling book. The text is a well-written and well-researched look at the myriad ways in which science fiction authors have approached the subjects of the title plus others.

On the other hand the narrative accompanying the illustrations is of the typical future-history, fiction-as-fact sort. The two approaches seem awkward together but the book is still enjoyable reading.

As is usual in a book of this type the illustrations have previously seen print as book covers. The reproduction is well up to the high standard you can expect from Octopus.

Published by Octopus Books.

96 pages. 12 1/4 x 9 1/2". Hardcover. £3.95.



## THE FILM BOOK OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S THE LORD OF THE RINGS PART ONE

Apart from being a strong contender for the "lengthiest title of 1979" award, this is a beautifully packaged production that is ultimately disappointing.

The book contains over 130 stills from Ralph Bakshi's adaptation of *Lord of the Rings*

together with a narrative telling of the movie version of the story (getting complicated, isn't it?). Unfortunately, Bakshi's animation does not produce good quality illustrations for books of this type.

For some reason the publishers decided to present the text in a very large, bold typeface and this, coupled with the style of the artwork, gives the impression of an expensive children's book. I'll leave it to others to argue the merits (or otherwise) of this condensed version of Tolkien's classic: I just find it a very highly priced tie-in with only a limited appeal.

Published by Fantasy Film Books. 76 pages. 9 x 10 1/2". Hardcover. £3.50.



## LAIR by James Herbert

It would be pleasing to say that this book enhanced James Herbert's reputation as a writer of chilling horror stories but nothing could be further from the truth. Doubtless this sequel to his best-selling *The Rats* will be just as successful (his followers are very loyal) but it has little to recommend it to newcomers.

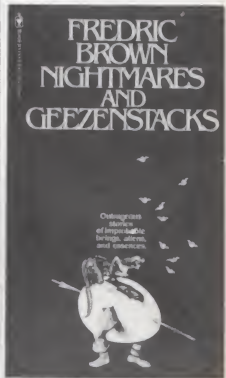
I found it very difficult to develop any sympathy for the central character. He, and every person involved, is very much a stereotype and the little personality he is given is two-dimensional.

The story definitely lacks suspense. I expected to be drawn through events by a necessity to find out what happens next—instead I dragged myself through by sheer will-power. Even the rats, disturbing though the thought of mutated, intelligent rodents running rampant in Epping Forest might be, did not come across as horrifically as they could have.

The scenes in which the rat attacks occur are very well written but, even so, I found myself more amused than tense.

All in all, long-awaited though it has been, *The Lair* is very much a non-event.

Published by New English Library. 256 pages. 95p.



## NIGHTMARE AND GEEZENSTACKS

by Frederic Brown

When I realised that this anthology contained forty-seven stories within its 192 pages I did not know what to expect. I found it difficult to believe that anyone could write so many stories, with an average of only four pages to a tale, and make them all entertaining.

As usual first impressions were misleading; not only did the late Frederic Brown keep my interest throughout, but some of the best of the stories take little more than a page in the telling.

The ideas behind the stories are very diverse, ranging from the death of the last(?) Tyrannosaurus Rex through three separate—but amusingly similar—tales of Great Lost Discoveries (invisibility, invulnerability and immortality) to the saga of the wife who goes on her second honeymoon with an impotent husband—her "cure" involves the Indian rope trick!

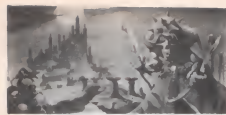
*Nightmares and Geezenstacks* is an interesting collection of stories. Some are amusing, some chilling, and other merely entertaining, but they are all well worth reading.

Published by Bantam Books. 192 pages. 85p.

Reviews by Alex Carpenter



# POSTERS



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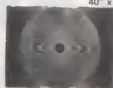
227 'SOD OFF!'  
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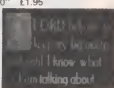
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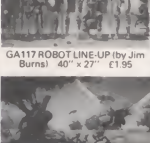
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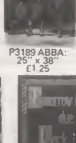
277 'O LORD... I':  
32" x 20" 75p



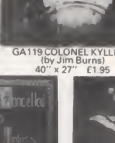
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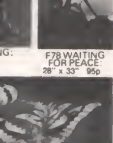
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Starburst SF Classics

# THE TIME MACHINE

Almost twenty years ago, George Pal, producer of such sf masterpieces as *Conquest of Space* and *War of the Worlds*, released what was to be his most successful film, *The Time Machine*. Phil Edwards looks back at this movie version of the H.G. Wells novel.



It is December 31, 1899. In his London home a young man known only as George (Rod Taylor), is holding a strange demonstration for four dinner guests, David Filby (Alan Young), Dr Philip Hillyer (Sebastian Cabot), Antony Bridewell (Tom Helmore) and Walter Kemp (Whit Bissell). He attempts to illustrate the possibility of movement through time, the fourth dimension, with the aid of a miniature time machine. His friends remain sceptical but accept his invitation to dinner five nights later.

Alone, George goes straight to his conservatory and climbs into the seat of a full size time machine and pulls the lever. The walls shake, lights dim and he is off on a journey through time - into the future.

His first stop is 1917. His home has been boarded up and the street vastly changed. He recognises his old friend Filby, only to find it is really Filby's son, James (Alan Young again). He pushes ahead in time again, finding World War Two in progress in 1940 and a nuclear holocaust raging in the year 1966.

He sets the controls for further into the future and finally arrives in the year 802,701 AD. He steps into an apparent paradise and meets the Eloi, the people of the future, rescuing Weena (Yvette Mimieux) from drowning when none of her friends go to her



aid. They are strangely lethargic and completely apathetic. Returning to his time machine he discovers it is missing, apparently dragged behind the locked doors of a massive bronze Sphinx. A terrified Weena blames it on the Morlocks, who live beneath the surface of the earth. She explains that they give the Eloi food and clothing provided the Eloi do what the Morlocks command.

Weena takes George to a great, ruined building, the remains of a past civilisation. She shows him the "talking rings", small metallic hoops which speak of past events when spun on a glowing dish.

Later, George hears a siren sounding from the Sphinx and sees several of the Eloi, including Weena, entering the Sphinx. He follows and discovers that the Morlocks feed on the Eloi as though they are cattle. George attacks the Morlocks with a blazing torch, and, seeing that they fear light, holds them at bay so that the Eloi can escape. At first there is no reaction, but when Weena tries to help George her companions pitch in, quickly subduing the Morlocks, and the Eloi escape to the surface.

Seeing the doors to the Sphinx are open, George rushes inside to his time machine, only to have the entrance slam shut before Weena can follow him. Morlocks grab for him, but he leaps into the seat of the time machine and pushes the lever in reverse. He spins back through the centuries and stops at January 5, 1900. He staggers into the dining room where he finds his friends impatiently waiting for him. All, save Filby, ridicule his story. After they leave, George returns to his time machine and sails off into the future again to rejoin Weena.

Filby returns a few moments later to discover

#### BBC transmitted a tv version of Wells' novel.

that both George and his time machine are gone. He notices that three books are missing from a book shelf in George's library and asks "What three books would George have taken with him, and will he ever return?" Answering the last question himself Filby says, "One cannot choose but wonder, for he has all the time in the world." The former question remains unanswered.

The first visual presentation of *The Time Machine*, published in 1895, was conceived by the author, H. G. Wells and a British inventor, Robert W. Paul. It was to consist of lantern slides, film strips, actors and lighting effects. Though patents were applied for, the special presentation was never made publicly.

On January 25, 1949, BBC-TV transmitted a video version of Wells' novel, with Russell Napier as the Time Traveller and Mary Donn as Weena, but it would be another ten years before the film version of Wells' story appeared in the cinemas.

Following the financial and artistic success of George Pal's production of *The War of the Worlds* in 1953 (see *Starburst* 4), the trustees of the H. G. Wells estate were impressed enough to offer Pal the options on any other Wells stories he would be interested

Opposite: The evil Morlocks herd the Eloi into their subterranean lair as George (bottom right) looks on. Top: George (Rod Taylor) is attacked by a Morlock. Left: George saves Weena (Yvette Mimieux) from drowning when her friends make no move to help her.

in filming. After reading the various Wells stories he decided on *The Time Machine* as the novel with the most cinematic elements and acquired the screen rights from the estate at relatively little cost. He presented the project to Paramount Pictures, to whom he was contracted at the time. They showed little interest, preferring to produce movies concerning the exploration of space, insisting that this was what the public preferred.

Undaunted, Pal went ahead and hired screenwriter and novelist David Duncan to draught a script. Duncan had already had several science fantasy novels published and in later years would go on to work on the screenplays for *The Black Scorpion* (1957) and *Fantastic Voyage* (1966). Meanwhile, Pal worked out his Paramount contract with *Houdini* (1953), *The Naked Jungle* (1954) and *The Conquest of Space* (1955). And as he worked he continued to develop *tom thumb*, which had been a pet project of his from the Puppetoon days. *The Time Machine*, and a story based on the legend of Atlantis. The latter was finally filmed by Pal in 1960 as *Atlantis, the Lost Continent*.

After continual interference by Paramount on the production of *Conquest of Space*, Pal left the studio and presented his ideas for *tom thumb* to MGM. They showed an interest and offered to let Pal shoot the film in their British studios where production costs could be kept down. Pal agreed, and *tom thumb*, released in 1958, was a smash success, even more so considering the small budget that Pal had worked to.

MGM were impressed, and asked Pal if there were any other projects he was interested

#### Pal considered James Mason and Michael Rennie for the lead role.

in producing for them. He immediately put forward *The Time Machine*, originally planning to shoot it in England. He worked out a budget of \$850,000 with the head of British MGM, Matthew Raymond. Pal even went so far as approaching classical stage actor Paul Scofield for the part of the Time Traveller. He also considered James Mason and Michael Rennie for the part. On his return to Hollywood, MGM executive Sol Siegel asked Pal if he could produce it as cheaply in America. Pal said he could and the film went into production in mid-1959, utilising MGM's Lot 2 for the exteriors.

Pal and writer Duncan considered updating the story, as had been done with *The War of the Worlds*, but decided to retain Wells' Victorian setting for the opening. Thus they could incorporate real incidents from history which the audience could relate to, thereby making acceptance easier of a fantastic future world of 802,701 AD.

For the lead, Pal chose Australian actor, Rod Taylor, who had been working in Hollywood in small parts since 1955. At the time Taylor commented, "The role in this science-adventure film offered me an unusual opportunity. It is in complete contrast to anything I have done before."

Weena was played by newcomer, Yvette Mimieux, who had several times won local beauty contests in the Los Angeles area. Pal was enchanted with her, describing her at the time as "a cross between a fairy princess and Brigitte Bardot."

For the intricate special effects involved, Pal contracted Project Unlimited, an in-



dependent unit made up of model makers and mechanical experts, Wah Chang, Gene Warren and Tim Barr. They were responsible for the construction of all the miniatures of London streets, the Sphinx, the miniature time machine as well as the glass paintings for the future world.

As with all films which require a multitude of special effects, producer/director Pal worked closely with the Project Unlimited team, art directors Bill Ferrari and George Davis, cinematographer Paul C. Vogel and makeup artist William Tuttle.

Ferrari designed the full size time machine, using for a starting point an ornate Victorian barber's chair and adding various fittings and controls. Ferrari and Davis designed the Victorian settings with great care, particularly the interior of the Time Traveller's home, using Victorian bric-a-brac and wood paneling enhanced with the use of amber lighting, which would contrast well with the bright, flat sunlight of the Eloi world and the dark mysterious caverns of the Morlocks.

However, Pal still had the problem of showing time passing. As a maker of puppet films he was conversant with the use of time lapse photography. One scene which uses this device involves a lady's dress shop opposite the Time Traveller's home. Using a rapid time lapse technique, Pal showed the changes in fashion through the centuries, the hemlines of dresses rising and falling with spectacular speed. A simple yet effective device.

Time lapse photography was also used effectively in another sequence when George

#### The Time Traveller is trapped in rock after the Atomic war of 1966.

is trapped in solid lava after the atomic war of 1966. Vogel photographed George and his time machine against a solid blue backing and matted the result into background miniatures of rock slowly weaning away over the years. The scene included several rocks and stones in the foreground which were also filmed against the blue screen. As the matted-in background "weans" away, these were pulled away with concealed wires in synchronisation to create a crumbling effect.



Opposite above: *The British quad poster for the film.* Opposite below: George (Rod Taylor) enjoys a meal with the Eloi. Top: George fights back using the Morlocks' own weapon, the whip! Above: A Morlock holds an unconscious Weena (Yvette Mimieux) for a publicity photo.

Another way devised by Pal to illustrate the passage of time was to have alternating bursts of light and darkness to give the impression of a day-to-night cycle. Using "brutes" (extremely powerful lights), Vogel flooded light through the skylight above the time machine. On each "brute" he mounted large discs, approximately seven feet in diameter. Each disc was divided in pie-like segments of colour filters – clear for daylight, pink for sunrise, amber for evening and blue for night. By revolving these filters, at first slowly and then faster, the effect of a daily cycle was achieved. As the Time Traveller was required to move even faster through the centuries, Vogel replaced the four-segment discs with two-segment discs, clear and black, giving a



METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER PRESENTS THE SPECTACULAR GEORGE PAL ADAPTATION OF H. G. WELLS'

# THE TIME MACHINE

IN FUTURISTIC  
METROCOLOR

WHIRLS  
YOU TO  
A WORLD  
OF AMAZING  
ADVENTURE  
IN THE YEAR  
800,000

ROD TAYLOR · ALAN YOUNG · YVETTE MIMIEUX · SEBASTIAN CABOT · MORE

Screenplay by DAVID DUNCAN





Top: George (Rod Taylor) and Weena (Yvette Mimieux) listen to the "talking rings" tell the history of Earth. Above: George at the controls of the time machine.

strobe effect. By creating this effect on the set, thousands of dollars were saved on a sequence which would otherwise have to have been created later, optically.

Apart from its special effects sequences, *The Time Machine* is probably best remembered for the scenes featuring the subterranean mutants, the Morlocks. Working from Pal's sketches and ideas, MGM makeup artist William Tuttle created grotesque latex masks and suits for the actors who played the Morlocks. Each makeup required two and a half hours' work.

First shown as shadowy figures to enhance their mystery and menace, they are later seen in more detail, but never in bright light. This maintained the menacing quality and also kept the outlandish makeup details less obvious. The glowing eyes of the Morlocks were tiny light bulbs, wired electrically to buttons in the gloves of the Morlock suits.

Cinematographer Vogel filmed the underground Morlock scenes with heavy back lighting and an emphasis on green, which has always been considered by film makers the colour of "fear". To show the Morlocks to be afraid of light Vogel used their point of view by bleaching out the screen with strong white light when George attacks them with flaming torches.

Further camera magic included showing the street outside George's home changing through the years. This was done by filming streets on several locations, then combining the various scenes using the matte process to create a single montage.

By late 1959, *The Time Machine* was completed and released to unanimous praise by the press and public alike. It was to be George Pal's greatest box office success. It was a magic formula, a perfect blending of science fiction, fantasy, adventure and horror. It deservedly won the Academy Award for best special effects.

Pal has always planned a sequel but unfortunately it has yet to be made. Whereas Wells' original novel had ended on a pessimistic note, with the death of Weena and the Time Traveller pushing further into the future to find the Earth devoid of human life and dominated by mutated animals, Pal preferred the up-beat ending his film has. Pal wanted his sequel to use the end of the original novel

as a starting point for further adventures of the Time Traveller.

As with any big success in the film world, many cheap cash-in films followed, but only Wesley Berry's *The Time Travellers* (1964) is worthy of note, mostly for its uncompromising ending of time travellers caught in a continuous "time loop".

On November 5, 1978 NBC-TV in America screened a television movie version of *The Time Machine*, with John Beck as the Time Traveller and Priscilla Barnes as Weena. Directed by Henning Schellerup, it has yet to be seen on British television. However, *The Hollywood Reporter* in reviewing it said, "Memories of the earlier effort (Pal's production) only been brighter in light of the going-over this Classics Illustrated version gave the tale. It's not that its changes were that unbearable - now it's a modern-day scientist who stumbles across the secret of travelling back and forth in time. The problem was that the movie went about its wretched business with such an utter lack of half-way decent execution, let alone the requisite amount of needed imagination." So much for that.

In late 1978, Nicholas Meyer (who had authored the successful Sherlock Holmes pastiche novels, *Seven Per Cent Solution* and

*The West End Horror*) directed *Time After Time*. In this retelling of the story, H. G. Wells (*Malcolm McDowell*) leaps aboard his time machine to track down his doctor friend, John Stevenson (*David Warner*), to modern-day San Francisco. The twist in the story is that his friend is Jack the Ripper! It is an interesting variation on the theme, but there remains only one true *Time Machine*, the fantastic adventure created by George Pal in 1959.

#### The Time Machine (1960)

Rod Taylor (as *The Time Traveller*), Alan Young (*David Filby*), Sebastian Cabot (*Dr Philip Hillyer*), Tom Helmore (*Anthony Bridwell*), Whit Bissell (*Walter Kemp*), Yvette Mimieux (*Weena*), Doris Lloyd (*Mrs Watchett*).

Produced and directed by George Pal. Screenplay by David Duncan based on the novel by H. G. Wells. Photographed by Paul C. Vogel. Music by Russel Garcia. Art direction by George W. Davis and William Ferrari. Sets designed by Henry Grace and Keough Gleason. Special effects by Gene Warren and Tim Barr. Makeup by William Tuttle. An MGM/Galaxy Production.

Time: 103 mins

Cert: A

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